DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 810 CE 057 826

AUTHOR Kerka, Sandra
TITLE Balancing Work and Family Life. ERIC Digest No. 110.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CE-91-110
PUB DATE 91
CONTRACT RI88062005
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Career Development; *Career Education; *Career Planning; Coping; *Course Content; Daily Living Skills; *Decision Making; Displaced Homemakers; Employed Women; Family Life; *Family Life Education; Family Role; Higher Education; *Home Economics; Home Management; Life Style; Problem Solving; Quality of Life; Secondary Education; Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; Stress Management
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; *Family Work Relationship

ABSTRACT

Career and vocational educators must prepare people with the attitudes and skills needed for successful integration of work and family life. Ideally, life and career planning should be taught as a unit beginning in the middle school. A life/career planning course should incorporate such topics as interdependence of individual, family, and career systems; developmental stages of the individual, family, and career; values, realistic expectations, and priorities; career and life-style choices; coping with multiple roles; sex roles and stereotypes; parenthood/family life education; child care and elder care options; managing time, money, stress, and change; using resources and developing support systems; dual career and single parent/displaced homemaker issues; and cultural differences in family-work attitudes. An example of junior/senior high programs is Home and Career Skills, New York State's required seventh- and eighth-grade course. Programs for adults are being offered both at the college level and in technical institute and community college classrooms and workplace seminars. Benefits of successfully combining work and family roles are improved quality of life; greater individual contributions to the well-being of society; increased productivity; a wider pool of competent employees; better employee morale; more aware and informed citizens; and a more holistic upbringing for children. (11 references) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED329810

DIGEST
NO. 110

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Balancing Work and Family Life

by Sandra Kerka

1991

EDO-CE-91-110

The myth that family and work occupy separate spheres is fast fading in the face of tremendous demographic and economic changes (Voydanoff 1984). Smaller families, increasing numbers of working women, nontraditional family patterns, and changing values are spurring a growing awareness of the interdependence of work and family life. Although the composition of the labor force and family structures have changed rapidly, attitudes and institutions have been slower to evolve. Many workplace rules and practices remain based on a male, single-earner work force, and many families still act under role-sharing assumptions based on the presence of full-time homemakers, despite the fact that fewer than 7 percent of families fit that model.

For many people, the conflict between these assumptions and reality necessitates finding better ways to balance home and career. This concern is not a gender issue but one that affects all people as they make life and career choices. Gender equity cannot be achieved until "society recognizes the importance of work and family roles for both women and men" (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989, p. 27).

Career and vocational educators as well as employers face the challenge of preparing people with the attitudes and skills needed for successful integration of work and family life. The field of home economics recognizes the importance of work-family issues in its mission statement, which notes that home economics education prepares youth and adults for both the work and family spheres and focuses on their interrelationship (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989). This *ERIC Digest* looks at some programs and practices in secondary home economics and career development and counseling for adults that deal with this subject. Essential curricular elements and strategies are highlighted, and benefits for individuals, employers, and society are identified.

Essential Elements for Life/Career Planning

- Two theoretical concepts underlie many existing approaches to the family-career connection: developmental stages and systems theory. Recognition of the developmental stages of careers, families, and individuals provides a better understanding of the stresses and conflicts arising from various roles, especially when high-demand stages of two roles occur simultaneously (Miller 1986). Systems theory emphasizes the interrelatedness of individual, career, and family and identifies how satisfaction or dissatisfaction in one area affects the others (Schneider 1990).

Ideally, life and career planning should be taught as a unit, and examples from consumer/homemaking education show that middle school is not too early to begin (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989). As people progress through the different stages of their multiple roles, reexamination of life/career issues is beneficial either in formal courses, seminars and workshops, or counseling situations in higher education and adult settings.

Ten critical choices affecting the work-family balance are as follows (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989, pp. 28-30):

1. Choosing to view work and family life as interconnected
2. Selecting a satisfying career
3. Choosing a career with day-to-day flexibility
4. Choosing a career with adequate salary potential
5. Deciding upon the right partner and time to marry
6. Deciding whether and when to have children and how to provide child care
7. Choosing a job with potential
8. Determining priorities at home and at work
9. Obtaining the necessary training for a career
10. Choosing to take control of one's life

These decisions can be addressed in the choice and sequence of topics for a life/career planning course. The following list of important topics for a life/career planning course is a synthesis of a number of program examples and curriculum guides (*Adult and Family Living* 1990; *Family and Career Transitions Resource Guide* 1989; *Family Life and Worker Productivity* 1986; *Individual and Family Life* 1989; Kaser and Frazier 1989; Miller and Weeks 1985; *Vocational Education Journal* 1989):

Interdependence of individual, family, and career systems
Developmental stages of individual, family, and career
Values, realistic expectations, and priorities
Career and life-style choices
Coping with multiple roles
Sex roles and sex stereotypes
Parenthood/family life education
Child care and elder care options
Managing time, a household, money, stress, and change
Using resources and developing support systems
Dual career and single parent/displaced homemaker issues
Cultural differences in family-work attitudes

In addition to these specific subjects, many family-work curricula emphasize the usefulness of transferable skills. Certain similarities between the home and the workplace--in structure and organization and tasks--indicate that some skills are useful in both areas (Miller and Weeks 1985):

Critical thinking	Creativity
Decision making	Communication
Problem solving	Conflict resolution
Goal setting	Negotiation

Junior/Senior High School Programs

New York State's approach to the reform of the general curriculum recognizes the value of teaching both career and family skills (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989). Since 1986, seventh and eighth graders have been required to take a course in Home and Career Skills in which the emphasis is on learning to learn and thinking skills. Students become aware "of a

CE 057 826

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

world where both men and women take care of the children, go to the market, and go to work" (p. 46).

Iowa State University researchers tested 37 lesson plans on balancing work and family in grades 10-12. They found that students' knowledge of work and family concepts increased and more realistic attitudes about the future were developed. The curriculum was considered appropriate for home economics, career education, business education, cooperative education, and other occupational areas. One important feature is a lesson on federal legislation supporting work and family life, making students aware of the effects of public policy and preparing them for advocacy roles as citizens (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989, pp. 34-35).

Juggling Lessons: Programs for Adults

The Career Center at Florida State University infused work-family information into an existing career planning course. The experiential exercises dealing with sex roles, marriage and family, and career planning were integrated within a conceptual framework based on systems theory. More recognition of dual career issues and awareness of family and work responsibilities were apparent after the course (Gerken, Reardon, and Bash 1988).

If people manage to get through high school and college without learning critical skills for balancing work and family, there is still hope. The curriculum developed by the Minnesota Vocational Education Work and Family Institute has been adapted for technical institute and community college classrooms and workplace seminars. Customized seminars for other businesses improved morale, team spirit, and efficiency and led two corporations to sponsor working parent resource centers in Minneapolis and St. Paul that offer reference materials, consultation, and classes (*Vocational Education Journal* 1989, pp. 36-39).

The Benefits of Balance

Work and family roles are both central to the personal identity and life experiences of adults. Educators, employers, and society can all help individuals harmonize those roles in their lives. Supportive educational strategies, employment practices, and public policies are those that enhance opportunities for children to develop well, expand opportunities for men to carry out their role in the family, and increase opportunities for women to participate fully in the labor force and society (Voydanoff 1984).

The benefits of successfully combining work and family roles for individuals, employers, and society include the following:

- Improved quality of life and mental health
- Greater individual contributions to the well-being of society
- Increased productivity
- A wider pool of competent employees, averting projected labor shortages
- Better employee morale and less turnover
- More aware and informed citizens who can exert constructive influence on public and private institutions
- A more holistic upbringing for children

In addition to the resources cited here, the ERIC database contains other examples of local, state, and federal family-work programs.

REFERENCES

Adult and Family Living. Stillwater: Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1990. (ED 323 391).

Family and Career Transitions Resource Guide. Columbus: Division of Vocational and Career Education, Ohio Department of Education, 1989.

Family Life and Worker Productivity. Bloomington: Vocational Education Services, Indiana University, 1986. (ED 276 863).

Gerken, D.; Reardon, R.; and Bash, R. "Revitalizing a Career Course." *Journal of Career Development* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 269-278. (EJ 388 225).

Individual and Family Life. Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1989. (ED 306 376).

Kaser, J. S., and Frazier, A. C. *Juggling Lessons*. Andover, MA: NETWORK, Inc., 1989. (ED 311 215).

Miller, J. V. "Helping Adults Balance Career and Family Roles." *New Directions for Continuing Education*, no. 32 (Winter 1986): 45-58. (EJ 344 849).

Miller, J. V., and Weeks, C. A., eds. "A Special Issue on Family-Career Linkages." *Journal of Career Development* 12, no. 1 (September 1985): 3-103. (EJ 324 890-900).

Schneider, R. R. "Incorporating Family Studies into Junior/Senior High School Home Economics Curriculum Using a Systems Approach." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 40, no 2 (Spring 1990): 66-68. (EJ 404 734).

Vocational Education Journal "Special Issue: Balancing Home, Family and Work." 64, no. 6 (September 1989): 24-41, 46. (EJ 398 614-621).

Voydanoff, P., ed. *Work and Family: Changing Roles of Men and Women*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1984.

Developed with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of OERI or the Department. *Digests* may be freely reproduced.

CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210
Telephone: (614) 292-4353 or (800) 848-4815